



# Dear Mr. Henshaw

by Beverly Cleary

Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

[Note: The novel is not divided into chapters.]

Leigh Botts has been author Boyd Henshaw's number one fan since he was in second grade. When he is in the third grade, Leigh starts writing letters to Mr. Henshaw. Leigh is having a tough time: he is the new kid in school and his parents have recently divorced. "I am mad at Mom for divorcing Dad," Leigh explains. "She says it takes two people to get a divorce, so I am mad at two people."

But when Leigh starts writing to Mr. Henshaw, he finds someone he can really talk to. Leigh tells Mr. Henshaw how much he hates living in his new home in Pacific Grove, California. He describes his life with his mother, too. By the sixth grade, Leigh is writing to Mr. Henshaw often. He sends the author a long questionnaire to be used as the basis for his school report. He is annoyed that Mr. Henshaw does not return the questionnaire in time for the assignment. Leigh continues to write, explaining that his father is a trucker who often hauls produce and manufactured goods long distances. His mother works as a caterer and her boss often provides special treats for Leigh's lunch. Leigh is especially upset that someone steals the best food from his lunch box. Mr. Frindley, the kindly school custodian, befriends Leigh and lets him raise the school flag on some days. Leigh is still very lonely, however, and decides to take Mr. Henshaw's advice to keep a diary. "I've been thinking about what you said on your postcard about keeping a diary. Maybe I'll try it," he says.

As Christmas approaches, Leigh is very sad because his father has not called, as he had promised. Leigh is delighted, then, when a trucker drops off his Christmas gift, a fine winter jacket. Leigh

enjoys Mr. Henshaw's latest book *Beggar Bears*, even though it is not funny as his previous books have been. Leigh enters a writing contest, but finds it difficult to come up with a plot for his story.

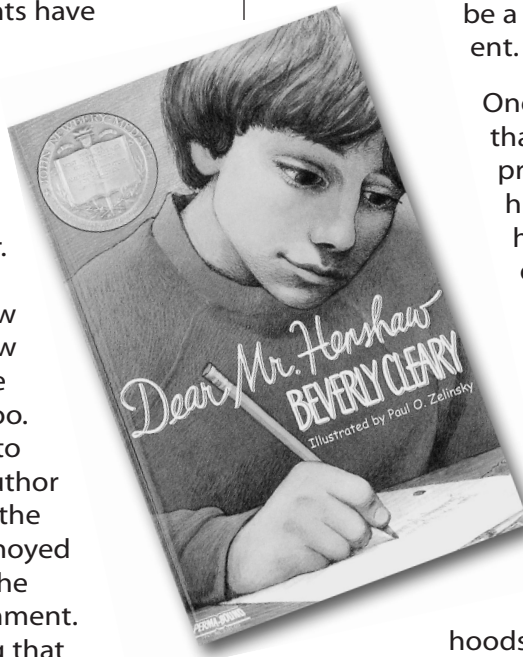
Leigh and his mother discuss the reasons for the divorce. She explains that Leigh's father is in love with the feeling of power he gets from sitting in the cab of his huge truck. She could no longer deal with his frequent absences on trips and his inability or unwillingness to be a responsible husband and parent.

One day Leigh is very bored. Angry that his father has not called as promised, Leigh calls his father at his trailer. Leigh is furious when his father reveals that Bandit the dog jumped from the truck and Leigh's father left without him. "You left Bandit to freeze to death," Leigh cries in his anger. Then Leigh realizes that his father is living with another woman and the woman's son. His mother helps him feel better by explaining how both she and Leigh's father had difficult child-

hoods.

Soon after, Leigh visits a local butterfly preserve. The beautiful place lifts his mood. His father sends Leigh \$20 as a gift.

In an attempt to catch the lunch box thief, Leigh buys a beat-up lunch box at a thrift store and alarms it. He sets it off in the lunchroom, to everyone's delight. Even the principal is pleased with Leigh's invention. Leigh's father comes for a visit and Leigh is able to finish his story for the writing contest. Leigh makes a friend, Barry, and feels less lonely. Leigh's story, "A Day on Dad's Rig," wins Honorable Mention in the writing contest. Leigh is invited to the luncheon honoring the winners. There, Leigh meets the guest of honor, writer Angela Badger. She praises his story for its honest feelings.



Leigh writes: "I wish someday Dad and Bandit would pull up in front in the rig ... Dad would yell out of the cab, 'Come on, Leigh. Hop in and I'll give you a lift to school.'" His father finally does pull up, to Leigh's delight. He has come to try to reconcile with Leigh's mother, but she refuses. Bandit has returned, but Leigh insists that his father keep the dog for company on his long trips. For the first time, Leigh's father addresses him by his name rather than as "kid."

## Timeline

- 1916** Beverly Cleary born
- 1938** Cleary graduates from the University of California, Berkeley
- 1941** *December 7* : America enters World War II
- 1948** State of Israel founded
- 1950** Korean War begins
- 1952** Elizabeth II crowned Queen of England  
Car seat belts introduced  
Polio vaccine invented
- 1954** Supreme Court issues *Brown v. Board of Education*, making segregation illegal
- 1955** Disneyland opens  
McDonald's corporation founded
- 1956** Sabin invents oral polio vaccine
- 1957** Dr. Seuss publishes *The Cat in the Hat*
- 1958** NASA established
- 1960** First televised U.S. presidential debate
- 1961** Peace Corps founded  
Berlin Wall built  
Alan Shepard is first American in space
- 1963** President Kennedy assassinated
- 1967** First Super Bowl  
First heart transplant  
Six Day War in Middle East
- 1969** Neil Armstrong is the first human on the moon

- 1974** President Nixon resigns
- 1979** Sony introduces the Walkman
- 1981** First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court  
Pac-man video game is very popular
- 1983** Cleary publishes *Dear Mr. Henshaw*
- 1984** *Dear Mr. Henshaw* wins the Newbery Medal
- 1983** Sally Ride becomes first woman in space
- 1989** Berlin Wall taken down
- 1990** Nelson Mandela is freed in South Africa
- 1991** Collapse of Soviet Union
- 1997** Scientists clone sheep

## Author Sketch

Beverly Cleary was born in McMinnville, Oregon, in 1916. As a young child, Cleary lived on a farm in Yamhill, a town so small that it lacked a library. Her mother arranged with the state library to have books sent to Yamhill and acted as librarian. Soon after, the family moved to Portland, where Mrs. Cleary attended grammar school and high school. She was so devoted to reading that the school librarian suggested that she should write children's books as a career. The librarian's notion took root, but with a twist: Cleary first became a librarian herself! After completing a junior college in Ontario, California, and the University of California at Berkeley (1938), Cleary earned a degree from the School of Librarianship at the University of Washington, Seattle in 1939. She worked as a children's librarian in Yakima, Washington, until she married Clarence Cleary in 1940 and moved to California. The couple had twins.



The children in Cleary's books face common situations, as we see in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. These include divorce, dislocation, and being the new kid in school. While her autobiographies reveal that many of her books had their basis in her own life,

Cleary has also written on topics with which she has not had first-hand experience. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, for example, marked Cleary's response to many letters asking for a book about a child of divorce. While Cleary's characteristic humor is still present, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* represents a change in her style and tone, and it is probably the author's most serious work. She remarked in a speech reprinted in *Horn Book*: "When I wrote *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, I did not expect every reader to like Leigh as much as Ramona. Although I am deeply touched that my books have reached two generations of children, popularity has never been my goal. If it had been, I would have written *Ramona Solves the Mystery of the Haunted House and Finds a Baby Brother* or something like *Henry and Beezus Play Doctor*, instead of a book about the feelings of a lonely child of divorce."

### Critic's Corner

Beverly Cleary is one of the most celebrated children's book authors of the 20th century. Among her most impressive awards is a 1975 prize from the American Library Association for substantial and lasting contributions to children's literature. Cleary also won a Laura Ingalls Wilder Award and a de Grummond Award, University of Mississippi, for distinguished contributions to children's literature.

*Dear Mr. Henshaw* earned a Newbery Medal, the highest award in children's literature. The novel also received a Notable Book citation from the American Library Association, was included on *School Library Journal's* "Best Books of 1983" list, noted on *Horn Book's* honor list; earned a Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, and *New York Times* notable book citation, all 1984. Perhaps most impressive of all, Cleary's books have received more than thirty-five state awards based on the direct votes of her young readers.

Not surprisingly, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* received enthusiastic reviews. For instance, *Kirkus* called *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, "Capably and unobtrusively structured as well as valid and realistic." *School Library Journal* said: "Cleary succeeds again. [Her] sense of humor leavens and lightens. *The New York Times Book Review* called the novel "A first-rate, poignant story a lovely, well-crafted, three-dimensional work."

### Other Books by Beverly Cleary

*Henry Huggins*, (1950)  
*Ellen Tebbits*, (1951)  
*Henry and Beezus*, (1952)  
*Otis Spofford*, (1953)  
*Henry and Ribsy*, (1954)  
*Beezus and Ramona*, (1955)  
*Fifteen*, (1956)  
*Henry and the Paper Route*, (1957)  
*The Luckiest Girl*, (1958)  
*Jean and Johnny*, (1959)  
*The Real Hole*, (1960)  
*Hullabaloo ABC*, (1960)  
*Two Dog Biscuits*, (1961)  
*Emily's Runaway Imagination*, (1961)  
*Henry and the Clubhouse*, (1962)  
*Sister of the Bride*, (1963)  
*Ribsy*, (1964)  
*The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, (1965)  
*Mitch and Amy*, (1967)  
*Ramona the Pest*, (1968)  
*Runaway Ralph*, (1970)  
*Socks*, (1973)  
*Ramona the Brave*, (1975)  
*Ramona and Her Father*, (1977)  
*Ramona and Her Mother*, (1979)  
*Ramona Quimby, Age Eight*, (1981)  
*Ralph S. Mouse*, (1982)  
*Cutting Up with Ramona!* (1983)  
*Ramona Forever*, (1984)  
*The Ramona Quimby Diary*, (1984)  
*Lucky Chuck*, (1984)  
*Beezus and Ramona Diary*, (1986)  
*The Growing-Up Feet*, (1987)  
*Janet's Thingamajigs*, (1987)  
*A Girl from Yamhill: A Memoir*, (1988)  
*Muggie Maggie*, (1990)  
*Strider*, (1991)  
*Petey's Bedtime Story*, (1993)  
*My Own Two Feet: A Memoir*, (1995)  
*Ramona's World*, (1999)

## Bibliography

### Books

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### Periodicals

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- Booklist*, September 1, 1953; September 1, 1954; October 1, 1977; May 1, 1979; September 1, 1981; September 1, 1983; September 1, 1984; April 15, 1998, p. 1460; November 15, 1998, p. 598; June 1, 1999.
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- Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, September, 1959; September, 1961; October, 1963; May, 1967; July, 1975; December, 1977; June, 1979; September, 1982; May, 1984; September, 1984.
- Children's Book Review*, spring, 1975.
- Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, fall, 1998, p. 131.
- Elementary English*, November, 1967.
- Entertainment Weekly*, May 7, 1993, p. 66; August 20, 1993, p. 73.
- Horn Book*, December, 1951; December, 1959; October,

- 1962; October, 1963; December, 1964; June, 1969; August, 1970; August, 1975; December, 1977; October, 1982; December, 1982; October, 1983; August, 1984; September, 1984; May-June, 1988, pp. 369-370; November-December, 1990, p. 738; September-October, 1991, p. 595; May-June, 1995, p. 297; December, 1995, p. 775.
- Library Journal*, September 15, 1950; October 15, 1952; September 15, 1957; September 15, 1962.
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- New York Times*, December 1, 1999, pp. B2, E2.
- New York Times Book Review*, September 14, 1952; October 4, 1953; September 26, 1954; September 16, 1956; October 9, 1960; December 26, 1965; October 14, 1979; November 1, 1981; October 23, 1983; November 11, 1984; November 10, 1985; September 9, 1990, p. 17; November 10, 1991, p. 33; November 12, 1995, p. 40; November 21, 1999, p. 28.
- Publishers Weekly*, August 4, 1951; August 15, 1953; July 10, 1954; August 13, 1955; September, 1961; April 3, 1967; April 15, 1968; May 14, 1970; March 31, 1975; February 23, 1976; October 1, 1977; July 30, 1979; July 10, 1981; March 2, 1984; July 12, 1993, p. 80; July 17, 1995, p. 138; June 7, 1999, p. 83; November 22, 1999; January 10, 2000, p. 24.
- Washington Post*, May 31, 1983; January 10, 1984.
- Washington Post Book World*, October 9, 1977; July 12, 1981; September 12, 1982; August 14, 1983; September 9, 1984; May 8, 1988; December 10, 1995, p. 20.



## General Objectives

1. To analyze how Cleary uses humor in the novel
2. To evaluate the effect of divorce on children and families
3. To assess each character's personality
4. To trace the sequence of events in the novel
5. To appreciate the author's creativity
6. To find examples of sadness
7. To find examples of kindness
8. To consider how literature influences Leigh
9. To determine the role that Bandit plays in Leigh's life
10. To understand why Leigh's parents do not reconcile

## Specific Objectives

1. To analyze why Leigh's parents got married
2. To understand why Leigh's parents got divorced
3. To see how Leigh's father feels about his job and truck
4. To understand how his parents' divorce has affected Leigh
5. To analyze why Leigh is lonely
6. To evaluate the effect of Leigh's dour mood on his ability to make friends
7. To appreciate Leigh's relationship with his mother
8. To assess Leigh's relationship with his father
9. To understand the role that Mr. Henshaw plays in Leigh's life
10. To determine how Leigh copes with having his lunch stolen

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Beverly Cleary's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**flashback** a literary device that allows the writer to present events that happened before the time of the current narration or the current events in the fiction. Flashback techniques include memories, dreams, stories of the past told by characters, or even authorial sovereignty. (That is, the author might simply say, "But back in Tom's youth...") Flashback is useful for exposition, to fill in the reader about a character or place, or about the background to a conflict. Cleary uses a flashback on page 66 when Leigh recalls a trip that he took with his father in his truck.

**humor** parts of a story that are funny. Humor can be created through sarcasm, word play, irony, and exaggeration. Katherine Paterson analyzed Cleary's brand of humor in a *Washington Post Book World* article. "When I was young there were two kinds of funny—funny ha-ha and funny peculiar," Paterson wrote. "A lot of funny ha-ha things happen in Cleary's books, but her real specialty is another kind of funny, which is a cross between funny ha-ha and funny ahhh. Cleary has the rare gift of being able to reveal us to ourselves while still keeping an arm around our shoulder. We laugh (ha ha) to recognize that funny, peculiar little self we were and are and then laugh (ahhh) with relief that we've been understood at last..."

**anecdote** a brief story that gets the reader's interest and sheds light on the writer's main idea and theme. To accomplish the writer's aims, anecdotes often describe funny, interesting, and unusual events or people. *Dear Mr. Henshaw* is peppered with anecdotes, such as the one on page 26 when the custodian deals with the vomit in a good-natured way. He merely says, "Looks like somebody's been whooping it up."

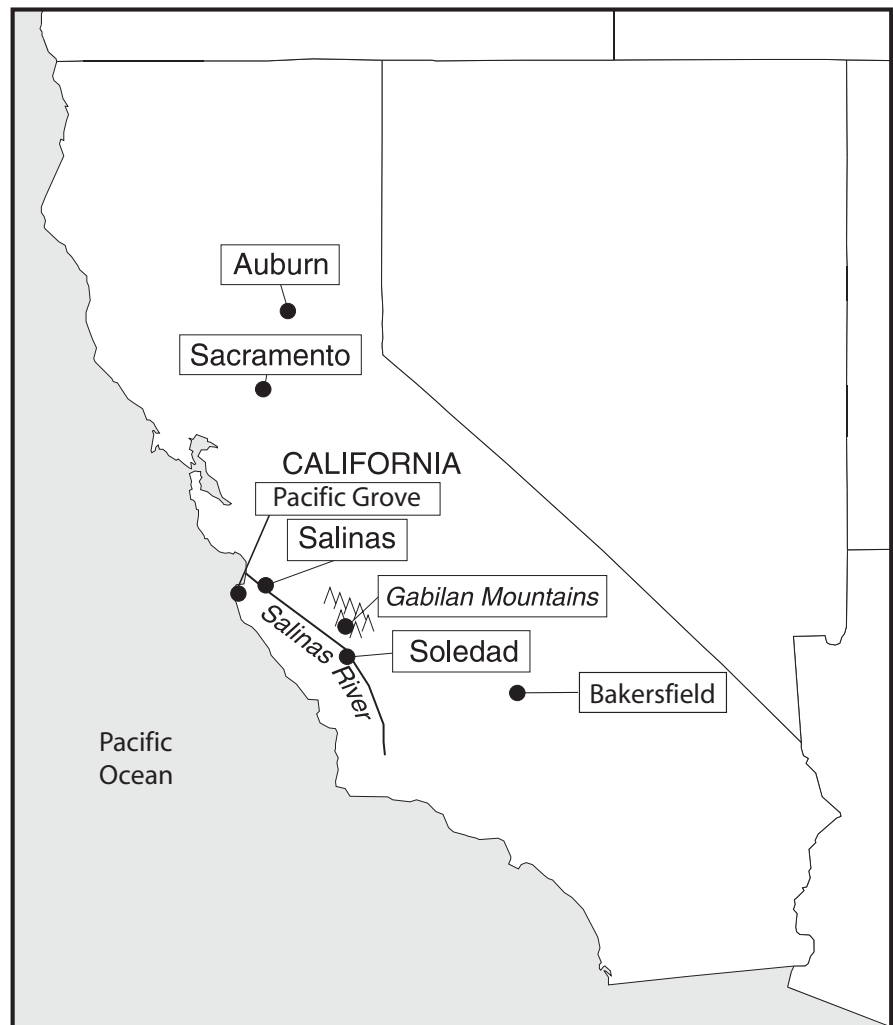
## The Importance of Setting

Many of Cleary's books for children are set on or around Klickitat Street, a real street near her childhood home. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, however, is set in two other places: the real city of Bakersfield, and the real city of Pacific Grove. Both are in California. Bakersfield is the county seat of Kern County, California. As of 2005, Bakersfield's population is estimated at 307,471. The city's economy thrives on agriculture, petroleum extraction, and refining. Bakersfield is California's third largest inland city after Fresno and Sacramento and one of the fastest growing of the larger cities in America. Bakersfield lies approximately 120 miles north of Los Angeles and about 300 miles southeast of the state capital, Sacramento.

The Yokut Indians were the first people to settle in the San Joaquin Valley, some 8000 years ago. In 1776, the Spanish missionary Father Garces was the first European to reach the area. In 1851, gold was discovered in the Kern River, and in 1865 the first discovery of oil was made in the valley. Settlements grew up, and the place soon became known as "Colonel Baker's field," after one of the local settlers. When Colonel Baker was given the assignment of surveying a township in 1869, the town was given the official name of "Bakersfield."

In 1898, the San Joaquin Valley Railroad arrived in Bakersfield, boosting population. Thirty years later, the Dust Bowl brought a great influx of migrant workers from the Great Plains. The great earthquake of 1952 changed Bakersfield's appearance, promoting the flat, sprawling style of building that dominates the city today. In 1965, a university in the California State University system was founded in Bakersfield. Today, the University at Bakersfield has around 7,700 students.

Pacific Grove, the other setting in the novel, is the seaside community well-known as the place where John Steinbeck lived for several years in the 1930s. The town had its beginning in 1875 as a summer Methodist camp, where people worshipped in tents. In November 1879, after the summer campers returned home, Robert Louis Stevenson wandered into the deserted campgrounds: "I have never been in any place so dreamlike. Indeed, it was not so much like a deserted town as like a scene upon the stage by daylight, and with no one on the boards," he wrote. Monarch butterflies were first documented in the area at this time. The town incorporated as a city in 1889. The Steinbecks moved to the town in 1930 and lived there six years, when they moved to Los Gatos. *Dear Mr. Henshaw* could be set in any moderately-large city because such settings rarely encourage close neighborhood bonds.



## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Prom*  
 Avi, *The Secret School*  
 Ann Brashares, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*  
 Meg Cabot, *Teen Idol*  
 Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*  
 Julie Dannenberg, *First Day Jitters*  
 Kate Dicamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*  
 Lisi Harrison, *The Clique*  
 Gordon Korman, *No More Dead Dogs*  
 Patricia Reilly Giff, *Pictures of Hollis Wood*  
 Carl Hiassen, *Hoot*  
 Barbara Park, *Skinny Bones*  
 Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging*,  
*Confessions of Georgia Nicholson*  
 Stephanie Tolan, *Surviving the Applewhites*  
 Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*  
 Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

### Media Adaptations

Pied Piper produced recordings and filmstrips of  
*Henry and the Clubhouse*, 1962, and *Ribsy*, 1964.

Miller-Brody produced recordings, some with  
 accompanying filmstrips, of *Ramona and Her*  
*Father*, 1979; *Beezus and Ramona*, 1980; *Henry Huggins*,  
 1980; *Henry and Ribsy*, 1980; *Ramona and Her Mother*,  
 1980; *Ramona the Brave*, 1980; *Ramona Quimby, Age Eight*,  
 1981; *Henry and Beezus*, 1981; *Ralph S. Mouse*, 1983; and  
*Dear Mr. Henshaw*, 1984.

A six-episode series based on *The Mouse and the*  
*Motorcycle*, *Runaway Mouse*, and *Ralph S. Mouse* was pro-  
 duced by Churchill Films for American  
 Broadcasting Companies, Inc. (ABC-  
 TV)

*Ramona*, a ten-part series based on Cleary's  
 character Ramona Quimby, was broadcast  
 on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in  
 1988.

Television programs based on the "Henry Huggins"  
 books have appeared in Japan, Sweden, and  
 Denmark.

Many of Cleary's stories have been adapted for the  
 stage.

### Internet

Beverly Cleary Official Website

[www.beverlycleary.com/](http://www.beverlycleary.com/)  
 Beverly Cleary : Teacher Resources  
[falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/cleary.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/cleary.htm)  
 Author Profile: Beverly Cleary  
[www.trelease-on-reading.com/cleary.html](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/cleary.html)  
 Kidsreads.com  
[www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-cleary-beverly.asp](http://www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-cleary-beverly.asp)  
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[www.bookpage.com/9908bp/beverly\\_cleary.html](http://www.bookpage.com/9908bp/beverly_cleary.html)  
 Meet Beverly Cleary  
[www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/cleary.html](http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/cleary.html)  
 Beverly Cleary  
[www2.scholastic.com/teachers/author/sandbooksauthorstudies](http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/author/sandbooksauthorstudies)  
 Profile of Beverly Cleary  
[www.edupaperback.org/showauth.cfm?authid=21](http://www.edupaperback.org/showauth.cfm?authid=21)

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in  
 Beverly Cleary's *Dear Mr. Henshaw* should include these  
 aspects:

### Themes

- divorce
- families
- food
- friends
- humor
- loneliness
- pets
- role models
- theft
- writing

### Motifs

- dealing with a move to a new neighborhood
- coping with a parents' divorce
- being a latchkey kid
- finding a sounding board
- looking for a surrogate father
- coping with rejection
- trying to solve a mystery
- missing your pet
- writing to famous authors
- enjoying a writer's humor

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the book. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. Since Dad and Bandit went away, my family is just Mom and me. (p. 16)  
*(Leigh is reeling from the effect of his parents' divorce. He and his mother have been forced to move to a less-desirable neighborhood; his mother now has to work full-time. He misses his father very much and is very lonely.)*
2. It is sort of falling apart, but it is all we can afford. (p. 21)  
*(Leigh and his mother are living in a run-down house in a poor neighborhood. His mother is happy because they have a real apartment, no longer a trailer. This shows the well-documented loss of income that women and children often experience after a divorce.)*
3. Maybe I'm just a boy nobody pays much attention to. (p. 25)  
*(Leigh does not have any friends in his new school, nor did he retain any friends from his previous school. His mother reassures him by saying that he is a loner, but Leigh realizes that he is one of those "invisible" people who pass through life without being noticed. Later, he realizes that his dour mood is also preventing him from making friends.)*
4. This is the first day of Christmas vacation. Still no package from Dad. (p. 40)  
*(The main reason that Leigh's mother Bonnie initiated the divorce is because her husband Bill is immature, selfish, and self-centered. He means no harm, but does not think of others. His disregard for Leigh's feelings is shown here. He doesn't remember to call and never writes. However, he does send the child's Christmas gift in time for the holiday.)*
5. Sometimes I lie awake listening to the gas station pinging, and I worry because something might happen to Mom. (p. 57)  
*(Leigh realizes that his mother is the responsible parent and fears that without her, he will be on his own. Leigh understands that his mother works very hard and does not appear to be physically strong. Leigh is sad that his father does not seem to be very interested in him.)*
6. And maybe if I hadn't been born, Mom might still be riding with Dad. (p. 64)  
*(Leigh worries that he caused his parents' divorce. This is a common fear among children of divorce.)*

7. "You left Bandit to freeze to death." (p. 71)  
*(Leigh is crushed when he learns that his father let the dog Bandit hop out of the truck cab at a rest stop and did not wait to retrieve him. Leigh's father explains that he had to get back on the road because of a worsening blizzard, but Leigh does not care. He identifies with the dog: his father deserted him just as he deserted their dog.)*
8. Dad was taking another boy out for pizza when I was all alone in the house with the mildewed bathroom when it was raining outside and I was hungry. (p. 73)  
*(Leigh is further upset when he realizes that his father has a female companion and has become close to the woman's son. In Leigh's mind, his father has replaced him with another child.)*
9. "What are you planning to make, son?" (p. 96)  
*(Leigh has been upset that his father calls him "kid" rather than by his name. He feels that his father does not acknowledge him as an individual, as his son. That the man in the hardware store calls him "son" drives this point home. Leigh does not understand that both "kid" and "son" are generic terms and are used interchangeably.)*
10. Then he leaned out and said, "You're a good kid, Leigh." (p. 133-34)  
*(At the end of the novel, Bill calls his son by name. This shows that Bill is making a real effort to be close to Leigh and be a key part of his life.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What makes Leigh first write to Mr. Henshaw?  
*(He is fulfilling a class assignment for "Book Week.")*
2. Why is Leigh lonely?  
*(His parents have divorced and Leigh and his mother have moved from Bakersfield to Pacific Grove. As a result, he is the new kid in class and has yet to make any friends. Further, his mother works a lot and his father is often away for his job as a long-distance trucker.)*
3. What does Leigh invent to catch the person who is stealing food from his lunch?  
*(He replaces his lunch bag with a lunch box and invents an alarm for it.)*



4. What prize is Leigh awarded for his story?  
*(He wins honorable mention.)*
5. How is Bandit the dog lost?  
*(The dog escapes from the truck at a rest stop. Leigh's father gets back on the road before the dog returns.)*

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)**

6. Why did Leigh's parents get divorced?  
*(It appears that Bonnie initiated the divorce because she could no longer deal with her husband's immaturity and love of the road. She wants to settle down and raise Leigh in a stable environment.)*
7. Why does Leigh keep a journal?  
*(The journal functions as an outlet for Leigh's frustration, loneliness, and anger.)*
8. What is the theme or main idea of this book?  
*(The theme concerns the negative effect of divorce on children. The author is not advocating that parents stay together for the sake of their children; rather, she is showing the pain that divorce often causes.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. How do you think Mr. Henshaw feels about all the letters that Leigh writes to him?  
*(On one level he is likely very flattered by the attention, but students can infer that he soon tires of the child's badgering, which is why Henshaw encourages Leigh to keep a journal. This will reduce the number of letters that Leigh sends to Mr. Henshaw.)*
10. What parts of this book did you find humorous? Why?  
*(Students could cite subplot about the lunch box theft and the descriptions of the delicate morsels that the thief steals.)*

**Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)**

11. Pack a special lunch for Leigh. Draw each of the delicious foods that you would pack in his lunch box.
12. Working with some classmates, act out a scene from earlier in the Botts' marriage when Bonnie and Bill were happy.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Beverly Cleary is one of the most celebrated children's book authors of the 20th century. Design an award for *Dear Mr. Henshaw*.

2. Write a song about one shoe on the road. Share it with some classmates.
3. Draw the butterfly preserve that Leigh visits.
4. Leigh's mother Bonnie and her friends make quilts to earn extra money. Using construction paper, design a quilt that you would like to make.
5. Design a new cover for this book. Use color, shape, and graphics to capture the novel's main themes

**Speech/Drama**

1. Give a speech explaining the advantages and disadvantages of trucks.
2. Give a lecture to the class explaining some ways that kids can make friends and fit into a new school.
3. America is obsessed with celebrities. Should Leigh be writing to Mr. Henshaw or is the boy intruding on the author's privacy? Does Mr. Henshaw have an obligation to respond, since he owes his celebrity to his fans? Debate this issue with your classmates.
4. Working with some classmates, role-play a scene in which Leigh and his father discuss their feelings for each other.
5. Speaking as Bill, explain what you would do differently to keep your marriage together.

**Language Arts**

1. Write a letter to an author whom you admire. Send the letter to the author's publisher (listed in the book). You can also check to see if the author has a homepage. If so, you can email your letter.
2. Read more about Leigh in another book, *Strider*. *Strider* is the abandoned dog that Leigh discovers on the beach. In an essay, explain what other information you learn about Leigh.
3. Solve the great lunch box mystery by telling who is stealing food from Leigh's lunch box.
4. Explain how you would have stopped someone from stealing your food.

5. Keep a diary for a week. As Leigh does, describe the events in your life and your feelings about them.
6. Work with your teacher and classmates to invite a well-know author whom you admire to visit your class.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Leigh gets to raise and lower the state flag. Draw your state flag and explain what each part represents.
2. Research the history of trucking in the United States.
3. Make a pamphlet showing the way to get a manuscript copyrighted in the United States.
4. Make a map showing the distance between Bakersfield and Pacific Grove, California.
5. Make a travel brochure for California.

**Science and Math**

1. Leigh is upset about his parents' divorce. Create a chart showing the divorce rate in America from 1990 to the present.
2. Leigh's father trucks goods around the country. Make a poster showing the primary goods produced for export in your state. Include fruits, vegetables, livestock, manufactured objects, and so on.
3. Show how to make a lunch box alarm, as Leigh does. You can sketch your design or actually make the alarm.
4. Leigh is very fond of his dog Bandit. Create a booklet explaining how to care for dogs.
5. Plan a week of nutritious brown-bag lunches for school.

**Alternate Assessment**

1. Working with a classmate, role-play a meeting between Leigh and Mr. Henshaw.
2. Describe Leigh's life before his parents divorced.
3. Compose a scene in which Leigh's parents do reconcile.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for the school newspaper.

## Vocabulary Test

Complete each sentence with a word from the word box. You will have words left over.

Word List				
<b>fictitious</b>	<b>gondola</b>	<b>refinery</b>	<b>canapés</b>	<b>wrath</b>
<b>disgusted</b>	<b>duplicate</b>	<b>snitch</b>	<b>foil</b>	<b>nuisance</b>
<b>mildew</b>	<b>scowls</b>	<b>handwriting</b>	<b>quiche</b>	<b>cottage</b>

1. Bonnie, Leigh's mother, made an egg and ham dish called \_\_\_\_\_ for his lunch.
2. Since he wrote to Mr. Henshaw so much, Leigh was becoming a bother and a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Motor oil and gasoline are purified at a place called a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. When people are very angry, they feel \_\_\_\_\_. This is how Leigh felt toward the person stealing his lunch.
5. Leigh \_\_\_\_\_ when his father does not call. His mother can tell that Leigh is upset from the frown on his face.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ often grows on the wall of damp places, such as bathrooms. It is easily removed with bleach.
7. Leigh knew that no one would tattle-tale or \_\_\_\_\_ on the person who was stealing his lunch.
8. Leigh makes up a \_\_\_\_\_ name to write on his lunch bag to fool the thief.
9. Divorced parents who share custody often provide \_\_\_\_\_ homes for their children, two places where the kids can live.
10. Small appetizers called \_\_\_\_\_ are often served at fancy parties.

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| A. Leigh Botts   | F. Bandit        |
| B. Mr. Henshaw   | G. Barry         |
| C. Miss Martinez | H. Angela Badger |
| D. Mr. Fridley   | I. Bill          |
| E. Joe Kelly     | J. Bonnie        |

- \_\_\_ 1. the author Leigh Botts writes to
- \_\_\_ 2. Leigh's father
- \_\_\_ 3. Leigh's mother
- \_\_\_ 4. Leigh's dog
- \_\_\_ 5. the kindly school custodian
- \_\_\_ 6. the novel's narrator
- \_\_\_ 7. the writer who is the guest at the luncheon for the student writers
- \_\_\_ 8. the fake name that Leigh writes on his lunch bag.
- \_\_\_ 9. Leigh's sixth-grade teacher
- \_\_\_ 10. Leigh's classmate and friend

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

- 1. *Moose on Toast*
- 2. "I hate my father."
- 3. "A Day on Dad's Rig"
- 4. lunch box alarm
- 5. divorce



## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Leigh lives with his mother in Bakersfield, California, after his parents' divorce.
- \_\_\_ 2. Mr. Henshaw and Leigh met when Leigh is in the third grade.
- \_\_\_ 3. Leigh's father forgets Christmas so his mother buys Leigh a gift and says that it came from his father.
- \_\_\_ 4. Leigh's mother works as a caterer.
- \_\_\_ 5. Someone keeps stealing food from Leigh's lunch box
- \_\_\_ 6. Leigh is very angry at his father when his dog is lost at a trucker's rest stop.
- \_\_\_ 7. He is even more upset when his dog gets run over because of his father's carelessness.
- \_\_\_ 8. Leigh has many friends by the end of the novel.
- \_\_\_ 9. Leigh's father wants to reconcile with Leigh's mother, but she refuses.
- \_\_\_ 10. The visiting writer is very impressed with Leigh's writing.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page provided.

- 1. Why does Leigh get so angry when his father refers to him as "kid" rather than by his name?
- 2. Summarize the events in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*.
- 3. Explain why Leigh yearns for his father to drive up and take him on a ride in his truck.
- 4. Speculate who is stealing Leigh's lunch. Figure out a plan to stop the thief.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Circle in the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. Leigh Botts has been author Boyd Henshaw's #1 fan ever since he was in **(second, seventh)** grade.
2. When he is in the **(third, tenth)** grade, Leigh starts writing letters to Mr. Henshaw.
3. Leigh tells Mr. Henshaw how much he dislikes living in **(Las Vegas, Pacific Grove)**.
4. He continues to write, explaining that his father is a **(pilot, trucker)**.
5. His mother works as a **(teacher, caterer)** and often provides special treats for his lunch.
6. Leigh is still very lonely and decides to take Mr. Henshaw's advice to **(join a club, keep a diary)**.
7. A trucker drops off Leigh's Christmas gift, a **(jacket, baseball bat)**.
8. Soon after, Leigh visits a local **(museum, butterfly preserve)**.
9. Bill sends Leigh **(\$100, \$20)** as a gift.
10. Leigh's story, "A Day on Dad's Rig," wins **(First Prize, Honorable Mention)** in the writing contest.

### Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

Briefly explain why each quote is important in the story.

1. When Mom and Dad got divorced, they sold the mobile home, and Dad moved into a trailer.
2. I don't have a whole lot of friends in my new school.
3. Sometimes I lie awake listening to the gas station pinging, and I worry because something might happen to Mom.
4. Maybe I'm to blame for everything.
5. "You left Bandit to freeze to death."

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| ___ 1. Leigh's mother                    | A. Bill          |
| ___ 2. the fake name that Leigh makes up | B. Barry         |
| ___ 3. Leigh's dog                       | C. Bonnie        |
| ___ 4. Leigh's friend                    | D. Boyd Henshaw  |
| ___ 5. the narrator                      | E. Joe Kelly     |
| ___ 6. Leigh's teacher                   | F. Angela Badger |
| ___ 7. the school custodian              | G. Mr. Fridley   |
| ___ 8. a trucker                         | H. Bandit        |
| ___ 9. the visiting writer               | I. Leigh Botts   |
| ___ 10. the writer Leigh admires so much | J. Miss Martinez |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page provided.

1. Trace the novel's plot. Include some events from the rising action, climax, and resolution.
2. Leigh is lonely. To what extent is his loneliness his own fault? Evaluate the causes and effects of his loneliness.
3. Analyze how Leigh feels about his dog. In what way does Leigh identify with his dog?
4. Explain the novel's theme or main idea.

# Answer Key

## Vocabulary Test

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. quiche   | 6. Mildew     |
| 2. nuisance | 7. snitch     |
| 3. refinery | 8. fictitious |
| 4. wrath    | 9. duplicate  |
| 5. scowls   | 10. canapés   |

## COMPREHENSION TEST A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A  |
| 2. I | 7. H  |
| 3. J | 8. E  |
| 4. F | 9. C  |
| 5. D | 10. G |

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. *Moose on Toast* is one of Mr. Henshaw's books. Leigh likes it very much for its humor.
2. Leigh writes this in his journal when his father forgets to call. Bored, Leigh calls his father. Leigh gets furious when he realizes that his father has a girlfriend who has a son. He assumes that his father treats her son like his own child.
3. This is the title of the story that Leigh enters in the writing contest. He wins Honorable Mention for the story.
4. Leigh makes an alarm for his lunch box to catch the thief who is stealing his lunch. He only arms it once, and then must set it off when he wants to eat his lunch. As a result, the alarm does not accomplish its purpose.
5. The entire novel revolves around Leigh's reaction to his parents' divorce. He is angry and lonely, cut off from people and miserable.

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T  |
| 2. F | 7. F  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- |                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. second        | 6. keep a diary       |
| 2. third         | 7. jacket             |
| 3. Pacific Grove | 8. butterfly preserve |
| 4. trucker       | 9. \$20               |
| 5. caterer       | 10. Honorable Mention |

### Part II: Quote Identification (20 points)

1. Leigh is reeling from the effect of his parents' divorce. He and his mother have been forced to move to a less-desirable neighborhood; his mother has to work full-time. He misses his father very much and is very lonely.
2. Leigh does not have any friends in his new school, nor did he retain any friends from his previous school. His mother reassures him by saying that he is a loner, but Leigh realizes that he is one of those "invisible" people who pass through life without being noticed. Later, he learns that his dour mood is also preventing him from making friends.
3. Leigh realizes that his mother is the responsible parent and fears that without her, he will be on his own. Leigh is sad that his father does not seem to be very interested in him.
4. Leigh worries that he caused his parents' divorce. This is a common fear among children of divorce.
5. Leigh is crushed when he learns that his father let the dog Bandit hop out of the truck cab at a rest stop and did not wait to retrieve him. Leigh's father explains that he had to get back on the road because of a worsening blizzard, but Leigh does not care. He identifies with the dog: his father deserted him just as he deserted their dog.

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. J  |
| 2. E | 7. G  |
| 3. H | 8. A  |
| 4. B | 9. F  |
| 5. I | 10. D |

### Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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